

UNITED STATES PATENT APPLICATION

FOR

**TWO SECTION MAST WITH
SELF-ALIGNING CONNECTIONS**

Inventors:

Alan Orr
Mark Trevithick

Attorney Docket No. HEL565/03283

Attorneys for Applicant
Head, Johnson & Kachigian
228 West 17th Place
Tulsa, Oklahoma 74119
(918) 587-2000

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TWO SECTION MAST WITH SELF-ALIGNING CONNECTIONS

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Field of the Invention.

The present invention relates to a method and apparatus for providing self-aligning connections for a two section mast for a drilling rig.

2. Prior Art.

5 In various oil and gas operations, well drilling rigs are utilized for subterranean drilling. A mast or derrick of a drilling rig are well known devices used in oil and gas and other drilling operations. The drilling rig will often include an upstanding mast connected to the floor of the drilling rig. The mast may extend vertically 40 to 50 meters or more and be composed of structural steel framework.

10 It is often desirable to move a large drilling rig, including all of its equipment, from one well bore to another. In the past, in order to move a large drilling rig, it has been necessary to disassemble or "rig down" the drilling structure. The rig down process requires a great many steps including disconnecting all ancillary services, laying down of the mast from a vertical to a horizontal position, disassembling the mast, moving the drilling structure components to an alternate well bore, and then
15 reassembling the entire drill structure in a "rig up" operation.

The drilling mast may include a back face joining a pair of sides and an open front face. The mast may be divided into a top mast section and a bottom mast section, with each mast section having front legs and rear legs. Each mast section may be brought to a well site on a vehicle and then the front legs and the rear legs of the sections are attached.

Once the sections of the mast are connected together while in a horizontal position, the mast would be moved radially from a horizontal to a vertical position.

When connecting the sections of mast together, it is necessary to align the connecting ends of the legs and insert pins through aligned openings to hold the sections together. This typically would require repeated movements of the sections until they were positioned in proper alignment. Even with repeated movements of the mast sections, there would be required extensive use of sledge hammers or other equipment to drive the pins in.

Also in the past, the concept of self aligning connections in which structural components are maneuvered into final position by guiding elements has been utilized and is common within many industries. In fact, at least one prior drilling mast utilizes a self aligning type connection to join a fixed lower section to an upper section that is lifted into position by a crane.

However, the present invention is unique in the configuration and geometry of the structural/guiding elements and in the process by which an upper mast section is positioned in a generally horizontal plane by a tractor trailer with dolly and then aligned and joined by the connection to a fixed lower mast section supported at one end by hydraulic mast stands.

Accordingly, it would be advantageous to provide a two section mast with self-aligning connections which reduces the number of truck loads required for moving the sections and which improves the overall efficiency of the rig up and rig down process.

It would also be advantageous to provide a two section mast with self-aligning connections which eliminates complicated and cumbersome systems required in telescopic, folding, or collapsible mast designs.

It would also be advantageous to provide a two section mast with self-aligning connections which reduces the time required for mast assembly prior to erection by repeatable and precise relative positioning of the mast sections with respect to each other.

5 It would be advantageous to provide a two section mast with self-aligning connections which facilitates controlled pin installation rather than sledge hammer driven alignment.

It would be advantageous to provide a two section mast with self-aligning connections which reduce or eliminate the use of sledge hammers during mast assembly and disassembly.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention is directed to a two section mast with self-aligning connections. The two section mast includes an elongated bottom mast section that may be transported and brought to a mast stand at a drilling rig by a vehicle such as a tractor trailer and dolly in a generally horizontal orientation. The bottom mast section is oriented so that the dolly is on a guide frame and the lower
5 most end of the bottom mast section is adjacent the drilling rig.

The bottom mast section includes a pair of front legs and a pair of parallel and opposed rear legs. Hydraulic cylinders are raised so that the rear legs of the bottom mast section are engaged and the bottom mast section is raised from the tractor trailer and supported by the hydraulic cylinders and the dolly. Once this is accomplished, the unattached tractor trailer is free to move away.

10 An elongated top mast section is thereafter brought to the well site by a vehicle such as a tractor trailer and dolly with the top mast section transported in a generally horizontal position.

The top mast section includes a pair of front legs and a pair of parallel and opposed rear legs. The bottom mast section is positioned so that the front legs of the bottom mast section are aligned but slightly lower than the front legs of the top mast section. Likewise, the rear legs of the bottom
15 mast section are aligned but slightly lower than the level of the top mast rear legs.

The pair of bottom mast front legs each terminate in an open alignment jaw having a pair of opposed hooks. The alignment jaws with pairs of hooks will engage the pair of top mast front legs which each terminate in a pair of protruding circular plates. The protruding circular plates align with and are received in the jaw of the bottom mast front legs and in particular in the opposed hooks. The
20 circular plates and the jaws each include a central opening to receive a pin or other fastener therethrough.

Likewise, the pair of bottom mast rear legs each terminate in an open jaw having a pair of protruding opposed circular plates. The bottom mast rear legs mate with a pair of protruding arms, each arm having shoulders extending from the top mast rear legs.

5 The hydraulic cylinders engage and raise the bottom mast so that the hooks on the front legs engage and receive the protruding circular plates of the front legs top mast section. As the bottom mast continues to be raised, the rear legs of the bottom mast likewise will come into alignment with the rear legs of the bottom mast until the protruding opposed circular plates of the bottom mast rear legs come to rest against the shoulders of the protruding arms of the top mast rear legs.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Figures 1 through 5 illustrate the sequential operation of a two section mast for a drilling rig with self-aligning connections between a top mast section and a bottom mast section;

Figures 6, 7, 8 and 9 illustrate a front leg of the bottom mast of the present invention;

Figures 10 and 11 illustrate a rear leg of the bottom mast of the present invention;

5 Figures 12 and 13 illustrate a front leg of the top mast of the present invention;

Figures 14 and 15 illustrate a rear leg of the top mast of the present invention; and

Figures 16 through 24 illustrate the sequential operation of the self-aligning connection of the bottom mast with the top mast of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

The embodiments discussed herein are merely illustrative of specific manners in which to make and use the invention and are not to be interpreted as limiting the scope of the instant invention.

5 While the invention has been described with a certain degree of particularity, it is to be noted that many modifications may be made in the details of the invention's construction and the arrangement of its components without departing from the spirit and scope of this disclosure. It is understood that the invention is not limited to the embodiments set forth herein for purposes of exemplification.

10 Referring to the drawings in detail, Figures 1 through 5 illustrate a sequence to assemble a two section mast for a drilling rig 10 during the rig up process which incorporates the method of self-aligning connections of the present invention. The drilling rig 10 may include a substructure 12 on which the two section mast is raised and installed as well as a draw works 26. The substructure 12 is located over a well bore, depicted by dashed line 14. The component parts of the drilling rig are brought to the well bore at a well site and then assembled for use, all as are known in the art.

15 The drilling rig 10 may also include a guide frame 16 including mast stands 18. In the present embodiment, a pair of hydraulic cylinders connected to the hydraulic utilities (not shown) of the drilling rig are utilized to activate the mast stands, although it will be appreciated that other arrangements are possible.

20 The two section mast includes an elongated bottom mast section 20. The bottom mast section 20 may be transported and brought to the mast stand 16 at the drilling rig 10 by a vehicle such as a tractor trailer 22 and dolly 24. The bottom mast section 20 is transported in a generally

horizontal position. Once at the drilling rig site, the tractor trailer 22 with bottom mast section 20 may be backed up and oriented so that the dolly 24 is on a ramp of the guide frame 16 and the lower most end of the bottom mast section 20 is adjacent the drilling rig substructure 12.

The bottom mast section 20 includes a pair of front legs 30 and a pair of parallel and opposed rear legs 32 (one front leg and one rear leg visible in Figure 1). Once the bottom mast section 20 has been brought into place on the guide frame 16, it is adjacent the substructure of the drilling rig with the lower most end closest to the substructure 12. The mast stands 18 are then raised so that the rear legs 32 of the bottom mast section are engaged. Thereafter, the bottom mast section is raised from the tractor trailer 22 and is supported by the mast stands 18 and by the dolly 24. Once this is accomplished, the unattached tractor trailer 22 is free to move away.

As best seen in Figure 2, an elongated top mast section 36 is thereafter brought to the well site by a vehicle such as a tractor trailer 38 and a dolly 40. The top mast section is transported in a generally horizontal position. The tractor trailer 38 with top mast section 36 may be backed up and oriented so that it is aligned with the bottom mast section 20. The lower end of the top mast section 36 is adjacent the upper end of the bottom mast section 20.

The top mast section 36 includes a pair of front legs 42 and a pair of parallel and opposed rear legs 44 (one front leg and one rear leg visible in Figure 2). As best seen in Figure 3, the bottom mast section 20 is positioned so that the front legs 30 of the bottom mast section are aligned but slightly lower than the front legs 42 of the top mast section. Likewise, the rear legs 32 of the bottom mast section are aligned but slightly lower than a level of the top mast rear legs 44.

Thereafter, the mast stands 18 are utilized to engage the rear legs 32 and raise the bottom mast section 20. As will be described herein in combination with the self-aligning connections of

the present invention, this will accurately align the bottom mast front legs 30 with the top mast front legs 42 and accurately align the bottom mast rear legs 32 with the top mast rear legs 44. Stated in other words, the front legs 30 of the bottom mast section 20 are in planar alignment with the front legs 42 of the top mast section 36 and the rear legs 32 of the bottom mast section 20 are in planar alignment with the rear legs 44 of the top mast section 36.

Thereafter, as shown in Figure 4 with the two mast sections aligned, pins or other fastening mechanisms may be used to rigidly attach the bottom mast section 20 to the top mast section 36. Finally, the combined top mast and bottom mast are raised from the generally horizontal orientation for transportation to a vertical orientation (not shown). The beginning stages of raising the bottom mast and top mast sections are illustrated in Figure 5 through use of a hydraulic cylinder or hydraulic cylinders 46.

It will be appreciated that the process is performed in reverse sequence during the rig down process.

As best seen in Figures 6, 7, 8 and 9, the pair of bottom mast front legs 30 each terminate in an open alignment jaw 50 having a pair of opposed hooks 52 and 54. Each aligned jaw 50 includes a central opening 48 to receive a pin or other fastener therethrough. Tabs 34 may be provided to receive a transverse retainer fastener to hold the pin in place. As will be seen, the alignment jaws 50 with pairs of hooks engage the pair of top mast front legs 30.

Likewise, as best seen in Figures 10 and 11, the pair of bottom mast rear legs 32 each terminate in an open jaw 56 having a pair of protruding opposed semi-circular plates 58 and 60. Each pair of opposed circular plates 58 and 60 includes a central opening 70 to receive a pin or other fastener therethrough.

The bottom mast rear legs 32 mate with a protruding arm having shoulders on each of the top mast rear legs 44.

As best seen in Figures 12 and 13, the pair of top mast front legs 42 each terminate in a pair of arms, each having protruding circular plates 64 and 66. The protruding circular plates 64 and 66 align with and are received in the jaw of bottom mast front legs 30 and, in particular, in the opposed hooks 52 and 54. The protruding circular plates 64 and 66 each have a central opening 68 therethrough in which a pin 78 or other fastener is received once the top mast front legs and the bottom mast front legs are aligned and in place.

As best seen in Figures 14 and 15, the top mast rear legs 44 each terminates in a protruding arm having a pair of shoulders 72 and 74. The arm includes a central opening 76 to receive the pin 80 or other fastener therethrough.

Figures 16 through 24 also illustrate the sequential operation of the present invention. Figure 16 shows a top view, Figure 17 shows a side view and Figure 18 shows a bottom view of the bottom mast section 20 juxtaposed with the top mast section 30. The views in Figures 16, 17 and 18 generally correspond in sequence to the drawing in Figure 2.

The lower most end of the upper mast 36 is brought adjacent to the upper most end of the bottom mast section 20. The bottom mast section is aligned but, as seen in Figure 17, slightly lower than the level of the top mast.

Figure 19 shows a top view, Figure 20 shows a side view and Figure 21 shows a bottom view of the bottom mast section 20 juxtaposed with the top mast section 36 generally corresponding to the process steps shown illustrated in Figure 3.

The mast stands 18 of the mast stand engage and raise the bottom mast section 20 so that the hooks 52 and 54 on the front legs 30 of the bottom mast stand engage the protruding circular plates 64 and 66 of the top mast section 36. The opening of the hooks is larger than the diameter of the circular plates so that they are guided into proper position.

5 Initially, the front legs of the bottom mast will be engaged with the front legs of the bottom mast section with the rear legs unengaged, as best shown in Figure 20. As the bottom mast continues to be raised by the mast stands in the direction shown by arrow 84, the front legs will be brought in alignment and the rear legs will also thereafter be brought into alignment. It will, thus, be appreciated that raising of the bottom section will move the bottom section both vertically and
10 radially.

Figure 22 shows the next sequence in the process as the bottom section 20 continues to be raised in the direction shown by arrow 84. The front legs are fully engaged thereby also raising the top mast section. Finally, as shown in the side view in Figure 23 and the bottom view in Figure 24, the mast sections are fully engaged and aligned. Once in the fully aligned position, pins 78 and 80
15 may easily be inserted through the openings to rigidly attach the bottom mast section to the top mast section.

Whereas, the present invention has been described in relation to the drawings attached hereto, it should be understood that other and further modifications, apart from those shown or suggested herein, may be made within the spirit and scope of this invention.